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## **KHATOON-E-BALUCHISTAN RABIA KHUZDARI (THE FIRST POET OF PERSIAN LANGUAGE)**

### **Abstract**

Rabia Khuzdari bint-e-Ka'ab was the first poetess of the Persian language. She also did poetry in the Baluchi and Arabic languages. She was born in 7 C.E. in Khuzdar. Her father was a rich man of the area. One of the renowned Iranian poets, Rodhki Samarkandi (b. 941 C.E) although recognizes Rabia as the greatest poetess of the world, he was also jealous of her. This was evidenced when Rodhki complained of her romance with her own slave, Baktash, in the royal court of Kandhar. Hearing this, her brother, Haris, got enraged and killed her. Other Iranian poets, such as, Attar Nishapuri, and Abd-ur-Rehman Jami, have also praised her poetry. In her poetry, she used the pseudonym of "Mags Roen". Unfortunately, most of her poetry has been wasted, except with few Persian verses.

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The history of Persian language and literature has its deep roots in history. History tells us nothing as to who is the first poet in this language but it has fairly become clear that Roudi Samarqandi is the first poet of this language <sup>(1)</sup>. Those who have a taste for Persian language and literature must be aware of Rabia Khuzdari (daughter of Kaab). She belonged to Khuzdar, Balochistan. But unfortunately, experts and academics in Persian literature have not researched this great poetess. Not only have others but also Baloch researchers have not shown a considerable interest in highlighting this great Persian literary figure. Rabia Khuzdari was ethnically Baloch and was from Makran. She was a contemporary of ancient Persian poets like Samarqandi, Shaheed Balkhi, Daqeeqi and Abu Shakoor. She lived in the days of Samania family which is considered to be the first and golden age of Persian poetry. Samania period starts from 390 Hijri (at the end of Tahiria and Safia periods). Not only great scholars and poets flourished in this

period but it also saw the harmonization of Persian language with its cultural environment. The great Baloch poetess Rabia Khuzdari is from the same period and her literary position was firmly established in this initial period of Persian literature. It was uncommon for ancient writers and critics to mention women in this field; it was more nuanced in the Baloch society as Rabia Khuzdari was from Baluchistan (Makran). Persian literature and language cannot be discussed properly without Rabia Khuzdari's name, particularly ancient Persian poetry<sup>(2)</sup>. One of the most ancient books on Persian language and its rules 'Al Mauajam' has mentioned Rabiya Khuzdari. It was written by Shams Qais bin Razi, another most important and authentic text on Persian poets 'Lubab al Lubab', has also mentioned her. It was written by Mohammad Aufi. Aufi has also given some reference from her work but it is very short and it hardly sheds any light on her life. Mohammad Aufi writes:

”دختر کعب عاشق بود غلامی- اما عشق او از عشق های مجازی نه بود“<sup>(3)</sup>

While highlighting the significance of Samania period Maulana Shibli writes in his “Shair ul Ajam” about Rabia Khuzdari that

“This is particular with the period that the literary taste had developed among women too. Rabia Khuzdari Balkhi was a first rate poetess and contemporary of Roudki Samarkandi. Her father was Arab and Rabia was born in Khuzdar, city of Baluchistan. She was well versed in Arabic, Persian and Balochi and wrote poetry in all these languages. She was beautiful and rich and fell in love with a slave named Baktaash. She moved from the temporal love to the spiritual.”<sup>(4)</sup>

But this kind of closeness between man and woman was considered unislamic and consequently she was murdered.”

خبر دهند که بارید بر سر ایوب      اگر بارود زرین ملخ بر او از صبر  
ز آسمان ملحمان و سر همه زرین      سرزد که بارود بر من کی گس رویین<sup>(5)</sup>

This description by Shibli is not from “Lubab al Lubab”, it is from “Majma al Fasha”. Shibli has not given any clue as to her murder. Many books, particularly “Majma al Fasha” mentioned that her brother murdered her due to a misunderstanding.

The actual text is in “Majma al Fasha” is as follows

بنام آن سیمبر زین العرب بود	جمالش ملک خوبان در جهان داشت
دل آشوبی و دلبندی عجب بود	به خوبی در جهان او بود که آن داشت
خرد در پیش او دیوانه بودی	کسی گر نام او بردی بجای
به خوبی در جهان افسانه بودی	شدی هر زده ای یوسف نمایی
مه نو چون بدیدی ز آسمانش	زدی چون چنگ زانوهر زانش <sup>(6)</sup>

Mujma al Fasha’s writer has also presented her couplets and discussed his own Masnavi Gulistan e Iram (Garden of Eden) in which he has narrated tragic story of Rabia and Baktaash. The subject of Masnavi “Illahi Nama” by the notable Persian poet Shaikh Farid Uddin Attar is the love story of Rabia and Baktaash. Attar Nesha Puri has highly artistically described the tragic story of Rabia Khuzdari in a Masnavi that spanned over five hundred couplets. Although the style of Rabia Khuzdari’s tale appears to be mundane, ancient scholars have construed it to be spiritual. Rabia Khuzdari was a pious and chaste woman from Baloch community. Her love was transcendently oriented. The pure spiritual nature of her love can be gauged from the fact that a poet like Maulana Jami in his book “Nafhaat ul Ans” places Rabia on a spiritual stature and considers her to be one of those saints who have tasted the wine of truth and transcendence.

Dr. Safa, Iranian Historian, in his book “History of Iranian Literature” has cited a quote of great Sufi poet Abu Saeed Abul Khair about Rabia Khuzdari.

نعیم بی تو نخواهم جیمیم با تو رواست  
که بی تو شکر رهراست با تو زهر عسل<sup>(7)</sup>

This brief description of Rabia Khuzdari’s life gives us an ample idea about her charming nature. Who would not want to know more about this beautiful Sufi poetess whose life is filled with a tragedy. Who would not long to know the life of the first queen of Persian poetry whose tale is full of pain and sorrow. It is well known that how women are treated in Indian subcontinent; they faced all kinds of sub-human behavior. The first poetess of Persian language had also been the victim of such cruelty. But it is

unfortunate that her life to date has remained shrouded in mystery. Modern day researches have also not paid any considerable attention to her life. Dr Raza Zada Shafaq, an Iranian historian in his book 'History of Iranian Literature', has not even mentioned this renowned poetess. Abdur Rehman Gharamzi has written detailed research articles on Rabia Khuzdari's tales in 'Dastaan e Dostan'. Its abridged version has been given by Akber Saleem in 'Zanan e Sukhanmar'. The last mentioned book gives scant information about Rabiya Khuzdari's life.

Rabia Khuzdari belongs to 4<sup>th</sup> Hijri. She was born in Khuzdar, Makran (Baluchistan); Khuzdar was a part of Afghanistan about a thousand years ago.<sup>(8)</sup> There was a Baloch tribe whose Chief's name was Kaab. He had two children; son named Haris and daughter named Rabiya. The tribal chief had great love for his children. After Kaab's death Haris became the sole heir of Kaab's wealth and of the kingdom. He arranged a celebration for his coronation and invited all the chiefs of Baloch tribes and other Baloch dignitaries. Baktaash, Haris's slave was well built, chivalrous and highly devoted to him. Since Rabia had a natural taste for poetry, she narrated the valiant traits by Baktaash in her poetry in the following words:

الا ای بادشہب گیری پیام من بہ دلبر بر  
(9) بگو آن ماہ خوبان را کہ جان بادل برابر بر

Many accusations were labeled against her character which were according to Nishapuri were baseless. These allegations were made against her because of Roudki's jealousy and malice. He desired to prove that he was the best poet and no one could excel him. When Rabia heard such allegations, she remained patient and it made her develop noble emotions like persistence, magnanimity and sacrifice. Therefore, Iran's great Sufi poet Maulana Abdul Rehman Jami and Maulana Abu Saeed Abul Khair has included Rabia Khuzdari among Sufi poets. The magnanimity with which Rabia Khuzdari laid her life in the quest for truth can not be found anywhere except in Sarmad Mansoor. Rabiya Khuzdari was not just a Sufi saint; she was a highly educated and scholarly woman of her time. History is not generous in giving examples of women poetesses. Rabia Khuzdari gained eternal intellectual life by composing some couplets. Whereas there is no dearth of poets who

wrote hundreds of couplets and yet their names have remained in oblivion. One of the reasons for her distinguished and distinct position is that she was the first poet of Persian language and she had the privilege to belong to Makran.<sup>(10)</sup> But this is not the only reason for her greatness. In my view her poetry carries meanings, thoughts, emotions and depths. If only her anthology or some part of it had reached people in today's world, it would have made a great difference in terms of showing the world how women lived in Baloch society in the past. It was a privilege for Rabia Khuzdari to be a poetess in those days when only man could engage in poetic art. This great lady wrote poetry in Persian, Arabic and Balochi. Rabia Khuzdari is known as 'Magas Roen' in her verses. She herself says:

دوش بر شاخک درخت آن مرغ      من جدایم زیار از آن مر نام  
نوحه مر گردد مر گریست بزاری      تو چه نالی که با مساعدا یاری<sup>(11)</sup>

Rabiya Khuzdari was a woman but her poetry was of very high intellectual caliber. She would mock the poetry written by man in her days. It has been reported in "Mushaf e Ibrahim" that, "Rabia was a woman yet she used to take pride in her abilities; she would mock men".

One of the characteristic superiority that Rabia had over Roudki Samarkandi and other contemporaries was that she was neither Persian nor Arab; her mother tongue was Balochi yet most of her poetry is in Persian. She wrote some poetry in Arabic and very little in Balochi, her own mother tongue.

Shams Qais Razi, in "Almuajjam", has considered her a great poet of Persian language and praised her poetry too. Researchers consider Roudki Samarkandi (First male Persian poet) and Rabia Khuzdari (first Persian female poet) as contemporaries. Roudki had Rabia killed due to jealousy. Her brother Haris murdered her on allegations of a love affair. Roudki Samarkandi hailed from Khurasan and Rabiya Khuzdari was from Makran; Roudki did not want anyone to challenge him in the world of poetry.

Rabiya Khuzdari's poetry, as has been mentioned earlier has an element of poetic harmony and maturity. It is an evidence of the fact that Rabiya did not just write couplets for Bakhtash (her beloved); she very thoroughly pursued the poetic inspiration. There

have been many poets who have followed her poetic methodology. In her poetry, there is an ample evidence of poetic techniques; she gave new life to the art of Ghazal. Dr. Zamaradi says that Rabia Khuzdari's poetry carries not only simplicity but also reflection of nature, smooth flow of thoughts, sorrow of love and Sufism.

This is worth mentioning that sufies gave high regards to Rabiya Khuzdari's poetry and used her poetry in their gatherings of spiritual meditations. They respected her so much that they considered her love for Baktash as a first step towards spiritual elevation. There is an abundance of such references about her in Maulana Jami Shaikh Attar. According to Dr. Zabiullah Sanaa (Iranian Historian), Maulana Jami has classed her as pious and Sufi poetess. Jami through Abu Saeed Al Khair says that Kaab's daughter (Rabia Khuzdari) loved a slave. But her love was not temporal. Hidayat has mentioned it in "Majma Tul Fusha" that she got attracted to Baktash named slave and then her love transformed into spiritual one. Attar Neshapuri, in his book "Illahi Nama", has mentioned Rabiya Khuzdari's tale of love with Baktash in 423 couplets; it is named "Hikayat Rabiya Dukhtar Kaab" (Tale of Rabia, Daughter of Kaab). He mentions Kaab's power, personality and influence. Moreover he also mentions his son Haris too. He appreciates the personality, valiance and Baloch traditions in the personality of Haris. He further throws light on the beauty and intellect of Rabiya Khuzdari in the following words:

عشق او باز اندر آوردم به بند      تونی کردم ندانستم بهر  
کوشش بیار نیاید سودمند      کز کشیدن سخت تر گر گردد کمنه<sup>(12)</sup>

Apart from Persian, poets from other languages have also been influenced by her poetic style. So much so that poets from the sub-continent have also followed her poetic techniques.

This is the life of Rabiya Khuzdari. It is actually her life story which has a love story and it is a tragedy. Her opponents equated her spiritual love with temporal one so that she could not move ahead in the world of poetry.<sup>(13)</sup> But it is known to all that spiritual love never perishes. After looking at her life, one becomes convinced of her steadfastness, devotion and true feelings of love. Maulana Jami has therefore included Rabiya daughter of Kaab in the group of saints. The Rabiya Khuzdari sacrificed her life in the

path of pursuit of truth; she can only be rivaled by men like Sarmad and Mansoor. An in-depth study of the life of Rabiya Khuzdari reveals that she was not just a Sufi woman but also a person endowed with high levels of intellect and knowledge; such examples are rare in history.

The contemporaries of Rabiya (Daughter of Kaab) have frequently mentioned her intellectual caliber and poetic eloquence. It is not known where she received her education and who taught her. There is not any mention of Rabiya Khuzdari's teacher in any book. It is difficult to form an opinion about Rabiya Khuzdari's sources of education. Though Rabiya Khuzdari's family was highly respected, her father was just a local ruler. The historians have not therefore given much importance to him. In those days, the art of history writing was just confined to the ruler and his relatives and friends. Women were not allowed to leave their houses. They did not have high social status. Mentioning women's name and ogling them was no less than a crime. Rabiya Khuzdari lived in such a society; it is clear that the details of her life could not have come to light. Since she offered veil and belonged to an affluent family, she must have acquired her education at home. Kaab, her father, loved her immensely and always told Haris, her brother, that Rabiya was not a daughter to him but a son. He told his son to treat her on equal terms after his death.

All historians and scholars of literature agree that Rabiya Khuzdari is the first woman poetess of Persian language. Not only is she considered the first poetess but also one of the architects of Persian language. She began her poetic initiative at a time when Persian language was beginning to make its influence felt in the land of Iran. In "Lubab Al Lubab", Muhammad Ayi mentions that Rabiya Khuzdari's poetry is full of eloquence and poetic sweetness. He maintains that Rabiya Khuzdari's poetic power is unmatched. She had a rare poetic genius. She made great efforts in her days to raise voice for the education of women. She worked hard for the improvement of women's condition in her society.

In a tribal age, she fought defiantly for the rights of women. She urged the rulers to pay attention to women's education. Muhammad Ayi says in "Lubab Al Lubab" that there is no shred of artificiality in Rabiya Khuzdari's poetry; her poetry is a reflection of her life. It has therefore both poetic beauty and power of expression. Here some couplets by Rabiya Khuzdari are being

presented so that one can make an unambiguous opinion about the poetic genius of Rabia Khuzda

زشت باید دید وانگاریه خوب دعوت من برتوان شد کایزدت عاشق کناد  
 زهر بایه خورد و پنداریه قند بریکی سنگین دلی نامهربان چون خوشبختن<sup>(14)</sup>

Apart from Persian and Balochi, Rabia Khuzdari was a successful poet of Arabic too. She has frequently used Arabic words, idioms and sentences in her poetry. There is no death of Persian couplets in which the first verse is in Persian and the second in Arabic. These things show the command of Rabiya Khuzdari over language and its expression. We now certainly have to agree with Dr. Zabeeullah Sanaa (Iranian Historian) that:

تاندانی درد و عشق داگ، حجر و غم کشی  
 چون به ہجر اندر بہ چکر پس بدان قدر من<sup>(15)</sup>

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